

Border crossing, passport and passcard information for North Dakota and Canadian residents

North Dakotans have always enjoyed the opportunity to travel and visit countries such as Canada, Mexico and the Caribbean and we have always welcomed visitors to our fine state. The federal government is moving forward with the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative (WHTI), and on June 1, 2009, new federal regulations will change the documents needed to enter or return to the United States.

Not only are these changes of major importance to North Dakotans, it will also impact our Canadian neighbors. NDDOT is working diligently to keep the flow of goods and people at a normal pace so that commerce continues for the state.

At the North Dakota Department of Transportation (NDDOT), our goal is to safely move people and goods and we want to keep our citizens informed of the steps needed to comply with the upcoming changes and to assure readers that our good friends up north will be able to continue visiting our cities for shopping and recreation.

Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Ontario have been working with our federal government to provide their citizens with enhanced identification cards that meet U.S. federal guidelines. These ID cards will be available to their residents by May 2009 and will allow Canadians to move freely across the border as they do now.

How this impacts North Dakotans

NDDOT also looked at the possibility of offering an enhanced identification card to our citizens; however, a new card being offered by the state department, a "passport card" appeared to be the most cost effective. A passport card differs from a passport in that it easily fits into a wallet and may be used as a border crossing document when returning from Canada, Mexico, the Caribbean or Bermuda by land or sea.

North Dakotans may apply for this card at any one of 59 sites in the state; places like courthouses and post offices. For a list of sites that currently offer this service, go to www.iafdb.travel.state.gov

If planning to enter the United States, the following is a recap of the documents needed:

Starting June 1 when traveling from Canada, Mexico, the Caribbean and Bermuda by land and sea:

- Citizens will have several choices: a passport; a passport card; an enhanced driver's license, only offered by a few states; or a "Trusted Traveler" card such as SENTRI and NEXUS for frequent border crossers.

- There will be various exceptions. U.S. and Canadian children younger than 16, for example, will need only proof of citizenship, such as a birth certificate; in organized groups, the cutoff will be age 18.
- A summary of the current and new rules may be found at www.getyouhome.gov, a U.S. Customs and Border Protection Web site.

Where to go for help:

- The national State Department's travel Web site, www.travel.state.gov, is a good place to go for information. If it's your first time getting a passport, you may visit any one of 59 "passport acceptance facilities," in the state as mentioned above. To renew a passport, a form is available to download from the Web site and return by mail.
- A passport costs \$100 for adults and \$85 for children younger than 16 (renewals are less); a passport card costs \$45 for adults (\$25 if you have a passport) and \$35 for children younger than 16. The passport card is valid for 10 years for adults and valid for 5 years for minors under 16.
- It's recently been taking about three weeks to process applications, but it is recommended to allow more time to make sure your passport or passport card is processed in a timely manner.

The NDDOT will continue to explore all options to ensure travel between Canada and North Dakota is as easy a possible for North Dakota's citizens.